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SOME *E. 10. 39*
CONSIDERATIONS
About the
CASE
OF
SCANDAL,
OR
Giving Offence
TO
Weak Brethren.

L O N D O N :

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CONSIDERATIONS

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SCANDAL

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Of giving
OFFENCE
 TO
Weak Brethren.

IT hath been often observed concerning our *Dissenting Brethren*, that when they are urged to mention any one thing required of the People in the Publick Worship of God in our Parish Churches, judged by them absolutely sinful, on the account of which their separation from us is necessary, and consequently justifiable, they either put us off with some inconveniencies, inexpediencies or corruptions, (as they call them) some things appointed and used, which in their opinion render our service less pure and spiritual; (the chief of which exceptions have been considered in several Discourses, lately written with great temper and judgment for the satisfaction of all honest and teachable minds :) Or else some of them tell us, that they are indeed themselves sufficiently perswaded of the lawfulness of all that is enjoined, they do not see but a good Christian may serve God acceptably and devoutly our way, and may go to Heaven living and dying in our Communion; but then there are many other Godly, but weaker Christians of another perswasion, with whom they have been long joyned : And should they now, at least to-

tally, forsake them, and conform, they should thereby give great offence to all those tender Consciences, which are not thus convinced of the lawfulness of holding such Communion with our Church, in Prayers and Sacraments, as is by Law required. Which is a sin so heinous and of such dreadful consequence; that our *Saviour* tells us, *St. Matt. 18. 6. Whoſoever ſhall offend one of theſe little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a Miſtſtone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the Sea*; and in *St. Pauls* account it is no leſs than Spiritual Murther, *A deſtroying of him for whom Chriſt dyed, Rom. 14. 15.*

Now this Caſe of *giving Offence to weak Brethren*, I have undertaken briefly to conſider, where I once for all ſuppoſe (as all thoſe muſt do who make this the ground of their reſuſing to Communicate with our Church) that nothing is amongst us impoſed as a condition of Communion, but what may be done without ſin; for were any thing in it ſelf ſinful required by our Church, there could be no room for this Plea of *Scandal*: that alone would be ſufficient reaſon for ſeparation from us. I Diſcourſe therefore at this preſent only with ſuch, who for their own particular could well enough joyn with us, but dare not do it for fear of *Offending* thoſe, who yet ſcruple, and are diſſatisfied at the uſe of our Prayers and Ceremonies.

Nor do I deſign exactly to handle the whole Doctrine of *Scandal*, or Elaborately explain all the places of Scripture concerning it, or ſtate the Caſes there treated of; Nor ſhall I now meddle with the Duty of Governours and Superiours, how far they ought to condeſcend to the weakneſs, ignorance, prejudices, and miſtakes of thoſe under their care and charge; but I ſhall confine my ſelf to this one Queſtion.

Whether there doth lye any obligation upon any private Chriſtian (as the caſe now ſtands amongst us) to abſent from his Pariſh Church, or to forbear the uſe of the forms of Prayer and Ceremonies by Law appointed, for fear of Offending or Scandalizing his weak Brethren?

Here I ſhall Firſt of all inquire, what is the true notion
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of a *weak Brother*. Secondly, What it is to *Offend* such an one. Thirdly, How far and in what instances we are bound to consider the *weakness* of our *Brother*.

First, For the resolution of this Question it is necessary to know, what is the true notion of a *weak Brother*. Now a *weak Brother* or *weak in Faith* in Scripture denotes one newly converted to Christianity; and so neither thorowly instructed in the principles, nor well settled in the Practice of it, the same whom our *Saviour* calls a *little one*, and the *Apostle* a *babe in Christ*. 1 Cor. 3. 1.

Conversion to Christianity is often called our new birth, and consequently at Mens first entrance into the Christian Church, they were for a while reckoned as in an Infant state; and accordingly were to be most tenderly handled and nursed, and gently used, with all favour and indulgence, not driven faster than they were able to go; till by degrees, by the improvement of their knowledge they came to be of *full Age*, as the *Apostle* expresseth it, Heb. 5. 14.

They were at first to be fed with Milk, to be taught the easiest and plainest Doctrines, against which least exceptions could be made; (as our Blessed *Saviour* himself would not at first tell his Disciples of the shame and sufferings he was to undergo, and when he did speak of them it was covertly and obicurely, so that they did not perfectly understand him, lest they should by it have been presently discouraged and tempted to have forsaken him;) no unnecessary burdens were to be laid upon them, which might render their new Profession grievous to them; every Stumbling-block and prejudice was to be removed out of their way, that might occasion their falling; the grown Christians and Proficients were Charitably to condescend to the capacity of these Novices, and make allowances, and for a time bear with their Ignorance and many mistakes and Childish humours, and deny themselves their own Liberty, and become even as Children with them, as if themselves were of the same mind and understood no better, than these raw beginners.

Now these fresh Disciples, little ones or Babes are the same with those St. *Paul Rom. 14.* calls *weak Brethren*, weak

for

for want of Age or Growth, or as the original word rather signifies, Sickly and Feeble ; like a Man beginning to recover from a wasting Disease, his Distemper, tho' cured, yet hangs a long time upon him, the Dregs of it still remain : He must for a while be carefully attended and watched, since every little thing discomposes him, and hazards a relapse. So was it with these first Converts. As soon as ever they were brought to acknowledge Jesus to be the Son of God, and were willing to become his Disciples, they were immediately Baptized, tho' as yet they understood but little of the Nature or design of the Gospel. The Apostles and first Preachers of our Religion were in haste to make more Profelytes, and therefore presently Baptized all that were willing to it without that previous Instruction and Preparation, which afterwards, when Churches were settled, was made necessary before Heathens or Jews could be admitted by Baptism. Thus the same day the Apostles Preached Christ to the Jews, *Acts* 2. they Baptized about three thousand of them, and *Philip* without any delay Baptized the *Eunuch*, as soon as he professed to believe that Jesus was the Son of God : and the *Jaylor* and his Household were Baptized the same hour at midnight, at which *Paul* and *Silas* spake unto them the word of the Lord. After their Baptism they were to be tutor'd and train'd up in their new Religion, where great care was to be taken, great prudence and caution used towards them, lest they should suddenly flie back and repent of their change ; for having been bred up, and so long lived Jews or Gentiles, and then of a sudden turn'd Christians, they retain'd still a great love and kindness for many of their old Customs and Opinions, they had mighty and inveterate prejudices to overcome, the Old man was by degrees to be put off, and therefore they were at first treated with all the tenderness and condescension imaginable, the stronger and wiser Christians would not stand rigidly on any little matters, would for the present tolerate many things, which were necessary afterwards to be done away, hoping that in time they might be better taught, and be brought off those mistakes they now labour'd under.

Had the Apostles in the beginning plainly told all the Jews of the ceasing of their Laws, the abrogation of their Ceremonies and Worship, the necessity of Circumcision, the taking in of the Gentiles, they would never have born such Doctrines, they would never have become Christians upon such terms, nor ever endured those Teachers, who seem'd to make so little account of *Moses* and their Temple. Now to gain these *St. Paul* became *weak* himself, tied up himself while amongst these Jewish Converts to such observances, which he was really free from, as if he had the same doubts and were of the same opinion with those *weak* Christians, and advises all others who did understand their Liberty, yet to oblige their Brethren by the same in-offensive carriage.

This then was the difference between the *strong* and the *weak*, the *strong* were the well-grounded understanding Christians, that knew it was lawful for them to eat all kind of Meats, that Christ had set them free from the burdensome Yoke of the Jewish Ceremonies, the *weak*, tho' Brethren, that is, believers in Christ, yet abstained from some Meats, judging them unlawful or unclean, and observed days, and Zealously retained the Mosaiical Rites, not being yet sufficiently instructed in that Liberty our Saviour had purchased for them, or in the nature of his Kingdom, which consisted not in Meat or Drink, but in Righteousness and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost. Hence I observe,

1. That the Rules which are laid down in Scripture concerning *weak Brethren*, principally respect those times when our Religion made its first appearance in the World, and were temporary provisions for the easier proselyting men to the Faith of Christ, or the better securing and fixing those that were already come into the Church. They are not standing Laws equally obliging all Christians in all Ages, but were suited to the Infant state of the Church, or rather to its condition whilst it was but an Embryo, till Churches were formed and settled, and our Christianity had got firm footing and Possession in the World. Thus *St. Paul* tells us, 1 Cor. 9. 19. *For tho' I be free from all Men, yet have I made my self servant unto all, that I might gain*

gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the Law, as under the Law, that I might gain* them that are under the Law. To them that are without Law, as without Law (being not without Law to God, but under the Law to Christ) that I might gain them that are without Law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the Gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. This was the Apostles design in all these Compliances and Civilities to win many to the Faith of Christ, by these wife Arts to insinuate himself and his Doctrine into them: but when he had once made his way, he then taught them another Lesson, and behaved himself after a far different manner. Now to do as St. Paul did, would always be the duty and wisdom of one in his circumstances, who had his office, and was to propagate any Religion amongst Heathens, and Infidels: like a Master that dealeth not so sharply with his Scholar at his first entrance into the School, as he thinketh fit to do afterwards. But the directions St. Paul gave, and according to which himself practis'd at the first planting of Christianity, do no more agree with our times, wherein Christianity is become the National Religion, countenanced by the Civil Laws and Authority, and so generally professed by every one amongst us, that we hardly know of any other Religion, than the same Cloaths we did wear in our Infancy would serve us now when we are full of Age.

We ought indeed to be very careful of Children, and lead them by strings, and remove every straw and rub out of their way, lest they stumble and fall, but it is ridiculous to use the same care towards grown Men. None of us Labour under those prejudices the first Christians did, who forsook a Religion in which they had been bred, and long lived; and as to the Jews had left a way of Worship commanded them by God himself, confirmed to them by many Miracles and Wonders, delivered to them from their Fathers by a constant succession of Prophets sent from God. There is not now amongst us any such competition between

two Religions, but every one learneth Christianity as he doth his Mothers Tongue. The Apostles therefore and Governours of the Church carried themselves towards these new Converts, as God Almighty did towards the Children of *Israel*, when he brought them first out of *Egypt*. He for a while led them by a Pillar of Fire and of a Cloud, gave them Water out of the Rock, and rain'd down Bread and Flesh from Heaven. This he did for them whilst in their passage, thus extraordinarily provide for them, and in some cases even humour that People, lest upon every little pretence they should return back to the Garlick and Onyons of *Egypt*; but after they were settled in the Land of *Canaan*, he then left them in their own hands, by ordinary Common means to take care of and provide for themselves, he did not shew the same indulgence to them, as he did whilst they were in the Wilderness.

St. *Paul* would not take that reward that was due to him for Preaching the Gospel, but himself Laboured hard night and day, because he would not be chargeable to his Converts, 1 *Thess.* 2. 9. and this he did for the furtherance of the Gospel, that all might see he did not serve his own Belly. But surely our Dissenting Brethren do not think themselves obliged by this Example, in places where Publick maintenance is settled on Ministers by Law to refuse to take it, and earn their own Bread by some manual occupation, tho' thereby they avoid giving offence to Quakers, and those who call them hirelings; and say they prophesie only for filthy lucre.

Thus it is usually observed, that St. *Paul* writes quite after a different manner to the Romans and to the Galatians, tho' upon the same subject. In his Epistle to the Romans amongst whom he had never yet been, he pitieth and pleadeth for the weak Christians, chargeth that they should not be despised or cast off; that no cause of offence should be given them, but to the Galatians a People that had been fully instructed in the nature of their Christian Liberty, amongst whom himself had planted the Gospel, and had been present in person, and so knew that they understood better; when some of them fell into the same Error, think-

ing Circumcision and the observation of the Mosaical Law necessary to Christians, he chides them sharply and rebukes them more severely; *Who hath bewitched you, O foolish Galatians, &c.* He who would condescend to the Ignorant Novices amongst the Romans, would not in the least comply with the Galatians, that had or ought to have had more knowledge and light; and afterwards when the reason of such forbearance ceased, when the Nation of the Jews had rejected Christ, and the *Gentile* World was come into the Church, the observation of the Mosaical Law, and the distinction of Meats contained therein, was so far from being tolerated in those, whether Jews or Gentiles, who through mistake thought themselves obliged to it, that it was condemned by the Rules and Canons of the Church. The sum of all this is, that whatever Argument may be drawn from St. Paul's discourses about *weak Brethren* by way of Analogy, or Similitude, or Parity of reason, yet there are no such *weak* Persons now amongst us, as those were for whom the Apostle provideth, or as those *little ones* were, for whom our Saviour was so much concerned.

2^d, I would desire our Dissenting Brethren to consider by what pretence they can challenge any privilege belonging to them under the notion of *weak Christians*, when according to their own opinion and conceit of themselves, they are of all men furthest off from being such in any sense. This is as if a man worth a thousand pound *per annum*, should sue in *forma pauperis*.

They who take upon themselves to be Teachers of others, wiser and better than their Neighbours, the only Sober and Godly Party, and are too apt to despise all other Christians as Ignorant or Profane, with what colour of reason can they plead for any favour to be shewn, or regard to be had to them in compliance with their *weakness*? Tho' they love to argue against us from the Example of St. Paul's condescension to the uninstructed Jews or Gentiles, yet it is apparent that they do not in other cases willingly liken themselves to those *weak* believers, or *Babes in Christ*. They have really better thoughts of themselves, and would be
Leaders

Leaders and Masters in *Israel*, and prescribe to their Governours and give Laws to all others, and to prefer their own private opinion (which they call their Conscience) before the Judgment of the wisest men, or the determinations of their lawful Superiours. And if in all instances we should deal with them as *weak* persons, turn them back to their Primmer, advise them to learn their Catechism, they would think themselves highly wrong'd and injured.

If the several Dissenters amongst us did in good earnest look upon themselves as *weak*, that is, Ignorant, Wavering, half Christians, did they think their dislike of the Constitutions of our Church to be the effect of such *weakness*, they would be either more careful to hide it, or would more diligently seek out for remedy; they would be more modest and humble, not so forward to judge and condemn what they do not understand; they would not encourage one another to hold out and persist in this their *weakness*, nor breed up their Children in it, nor so Zealously endeavour to, insil the same prejudices and mistakes into all with whom they converse. But the truth is, they ordinarily look upon their opposition to the orders of our Church as the effect of an higher illumination, greater knowledge than other Men have attained unto, they rather count us the *weak* Christians; if some of them will allow us so much; for otherwise if they do not take us for the weaker and worse Christians; Why do they separate from us? Why do they associate and combine together into distinct Congregations, as being purer, more select Christians than others? Now tho' such persons as these may be in truth very *weak*, of little judgment or goodness, notwithstanding this conceit of themselves and their Party, yet these are not by any means to plead for indulgence under that Character, nor to expect we should forgo our just Liberty to please and humour them.

And that this is nothing but the plain truth is sufficiently evident from this one observation, that many amongst them will grant our Reformation to have been very excellent and laudable for those days of Darkness and Ignorance

rance wherein it was first made: But we now, say they, see by a clearer light, have greater knowledge, and have arrived to higher perfection, and so discover and cannot bear those faults and defects, which before were tolerable. Now who doth not see that these two pleas are utterly inconsistent & destructive of one another? to desire abatement of the Ceremonies, and abolition or alteration of the Liturgy in compliance with their *weakness*, and to demand the same because of the greater knowledge and light they now enjoy, above that Age wherein this present Constitution of our Church was established. This shews they will be either *weak* or *strong* according as it best suits with the Argument they are managing against us; they are contented to be reckoned as *weak*, only that on it they may ground a plausible objection against us.

3. Those who are really *weak*, that is, ignorant and injudicious, are to be born withal only for a time, till they have received better instruction. We cannot be always *Babes in Christ*, without our own gross fault and neglect; he is something worse than a *weak* man who is fond of, and resolutely against all means of Conviction persists in his Ignorance and mistake. The case of young beginners and Novices is very pitiabie, who have not been taught their lesson, but the same condescension is not due to those, who are ever learning, and yet are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth, not for want of capacity to understand, but for want of humility and willingness to be instructed. Such who are peevish and stubborn, whose Ignorance and Error is Voluntary and affected, who will not yield to the clearest reason, if it be against their interest or their party, can upon no account claim the privileges of *weak* persons.

It is a great piece of inhumanity and cruelty to put a Stumbling-block in the way of a blind Man, but he walks at his own peril, who hath Eyes, and will not be persuaded to open them, that he might see and choose his way. Thus our Saviour answered his Disciples when they told him that the Pharisees were offended at his Doctrine, *Let them alone, they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the*

the blind, both shall fall into the Ditch, St. Matt. 18. 14. They were resolved not to be satisfied with any thing our Saviour said or did, they watched for an advantage and sought occasion against him. It was their Malice, not their Ignorance, that made them so apt to be *offended*. Of these therefore our Saviour had no regard, who were so unreasonable and obstinate in their opposition.

Not that I would be so uncharitable as to condemn all, or the generality of our Nonconforming Brethren for malicious and wilful in their dissent from us. God forbid that I should pass such an unmerciful sentence on so many (as I believe) well meaning, tho' miserably abused persons, to their own Master they stand or fall. But however.

1. I would out of charity to them beg earnestly of them, that they would thorowly examine whether they have Conscientiously used all due means in their power for information of their judgments concerning those things they doubt of; whether they have sincerely endeavoured to satisfy themselves, and have devoutly Prayed to God to free their minds from all prejudices and corrupt affections, and have patiently considered the grounds and reasons of their Separation from us; for unless it be thus really with them, their *weakness* is no more to be pitied, than that mans Sickness, who might be cured by an easie remedy if he would but vouchsafe to apply it, or would submit to good Counsel.

2. I must say that old and inveterate mistakes, that have been a thousand times answered and protested against, are not much to be heeded by us. If People will by no means be prevailed upon, having sufficient light and time allowed them, to lay aside their Childish apprehensions and suspicions, they can hardly be thought to deserve that compassion and tenderness St. Paul prescribes towards *weak Brethren*. I shall give one plain instance. Let us suppose that at the first Reformation of Religion amongst us some very *weak* (and such they must be if honest) were *offended* at the Church's requiring Kneeling at the receiving the Sacrament of the Lords Supper, as seeming

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to them to imply the adoration of the Bread and Wine, and as likely to harden some Ignorant People in that monstrous conceit of Transubstantiation: But now after so many publick Declarations made by our Church, wherein she avows that no such thing is intended, after the constant profession of so many, that have used that decent Ceremony, that they abhor the Doctrine of Christs bodily presence, nay after the couragious sufferings, even death it self, of those that first Established this Reformation, rather than they would worship the *Hest*; if after all this, people shall still clamour against this gesture as Popish, and be offended with those that use it, as if thereby they gave divine honour to the Elements, all that I shall say is this; it is a great sign that it is not infirmity only, to which condescension is due, but something worse that raiseth and maintaineth such exceptions and offences.

This I suppose holds true even in things where the offence ariseth from their doubtful or suspicious nature, that are capable of being misunderstood and abused, and may be apt through mistake to provoke or tempt others to evil. Yet if there be no moral evil in them, and the doing of them is of some considerable consequence or advantage to me, I am bound to forbear them no longer, than till I have taken due care to inform others rightly of the matter, and warn them of the danger, till I have endeavoured to rectifie their judgments concerning the innocency of my action and intention, and given them notice of the evil that might possibly by any action happen to them. If I dig a Pit, or lay a block in the way, whereby others not knowing any thing of it are hurt and wounded, here I stand chargeable with it, and am guilty in causing them to fall; but if they are plainly and often told of it, and being forewarned yet will run into the danger, they are then only to thank themselves, and it is purely their own fault. Now if it be thus in cases that are liable to suspicion and misinterpretation, it holds much more in our Ceremonies and the Orders of our Church, where the offence that is taken at them ariseth not so much from the nature of the injunctions, as from mens gross Ignorance, misconception or perverseness. Thus men are

no longer *weak* in Scripture sense, than they are inculpably Ignorant, or which is all one, the Plea of *weakness* is gone after that sufficient instruction hath been given or offered to them, and other allowances made according to mens different capacities of understanding. This shall suffice for the first thing propounded, to shew what is the true notion of a *weak Brother*.

2. I proceed to give you an account what it is to *offend* such an one. Because I write for the use of the Common people only, I shall not trouble them with the several significations of the *Greek* word which is Translated *Scandal* or *offence*, nor distinctly consider the several places of Scripture where it is used, only so far as plainly to shew, First, that people are generally mistaken in the sense they have of it. Secondly, What it is truly to *offend* or *give offence*.

1. That people are generally mistaken about the sense of *offending* or *giving offence*. For by it they commonly understand displeasing or grieving another, and making him angry with them, and so consequently they think themselves in Conscience bound to forbear all those things, which gently persons do not like or approve of, or is contrary to their fancy and judgment. It is notorious, that most of the ordinary sort of *Dissenters*, who assign this as the reason of their not conforming to the Established Laws of the Church, because by doing so they shall *offend* their Brethren, mean nothing else by it, but that they shall fall into disgrace with, incur the displeasure and provoke the anger of those, with whom they have held Communion for a long time in religious exercises. They, good men, will be mightily troubled and vexed to see or hear such a sad thing, and this is taken by many amongst them for an heinous crime, even the same which St. Paul calls *Scandalizing a weak Brother*, to do any thing which may chance to put any of their Godly Brethren out of humour.

The occasion of this false apprehension is in all likelihood the Ambiguity of our *English* word *offend*, which is used in the Translation of our Bibles. In our Language it signifies, to displease, or to do something which another dislikes; but the *Greek* word, which is so rendered, signifies

fies to lay a stumbling block in the way of another, which causes him to fall, or to ensnare and deceive him into something that is evil, as I shall shew more largely presently. We must not therefore interpret the places of Scripture, where *offend* or *offence* are found by the common importance of the words amongst us, but by the undoubted signification of the original word, which all learned men agree to have quite another sense.

It must not be concealed that there is one place in the famous fourteenth chapter of the *Romans* that seems to favour this popular conceit *v. 15. If thy Brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably*, and it is the only one I know of that sounds this way, but surely it is more reasonable, that this one verse should be interpreted by all the other places of Scripture about this matter, than all the rest explained agreeably to this single verse. Nay it sufficiently appears that by *grieving* our Brother, is not meant displeasing him, or making him sorry or sad, but wounding or hurting him, and so it is used to denote, that which causes grief or sorrow. For in the very next words it follows, *destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died*; and what is here expressed by *grieving* is *v. 13. called, putting a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall*, and *v. 21. it is good neither to eat Flesh, nor drink Wine, nor any thing whereby thy Brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak*; all which signify the same with being *grieved*. To be *offended* or *grieved* is not to be troubled at what another hath done out of pity and concern for his Soul, but to receive hurt our selves from it, being by it drawn or deceived into some sin, and our own fall occasioned by what our Brother hath done, is that which creates the grief and trouble. But because this mistake doth so generally prevail amongst many, as I hope, well disposed people, who think that they must not do any thing, at which good men are displeased or grieved, I shall offer these few things to their consideration.

1. That thus to censure and condemn the actions, and to be displeased and angry with the persons of those that differ from them, or refuse any longer to joyn with them in their Separate Congregations, is a great instance of peevishness and uncharitableness, and is that very sin which St.

Paul

Paul often warns his *weak* believers against, *viz.* that they should not rashly judge those who knew their duty, and understood their Christian liberty better than themselves. This seems to be the same with that Argument the Papists use to perswade men into, or to keep them in their Communion, as the safest way to Heaven; since they so confidently damn all Men, whom, tho' never so unjustly, they thrust out of their Church. Because some of our *Desseing Brethren* are so froward and unmerciful in their censures, and so fond of their own way, as to brand all that return to the Church with the infamous names of Apostates, Time-servers, Men that have made Shipwrack of Faith and a good Conscience, and have forsaken Christ for fear of Persecution, and the like; therefore all those, who are convinced of the lawfulness of Conformity, yet ought still to continue with them in their Separation, lest they provoke and irritate their anger and displeasure against them; and thus any company of men, that shall joyn together and resolve to quarrel with all that do not as they do, or that shall leave their society, must oblige all for ever to remain with them, for fear of giving them *offence*. If what I do is not evil in it self, it cannot become such, because another Man is causelessly angry with me for doing of it. Let but those, who Separate from us, mortifie all pride and overweening opinion of themselves, and their own way, let them lay aside all Zeal of parties and little singularities, and learn to judge righteously and soberly of themselves and others, and then the cause of all this *offence* will be soon removed.

2. They that pretend that this fear of *offending*, that is, displeasing their *weak* Brethren hinders their compliance with the Church, ought seriously to examine themselves, whether it is not really only the care of their credit, and reputation with their party, that keeps them from Conformity. They are loth to lose that share they have in the affections of so many, or to sink in that estimation they have obtained of great Sanctity, by joyning with the strictest and purest Christians. For undoubtedly Men's reputation amongst a party is a very great temptation to detain them in Error, and is a mighty prejudice to their understanding,

and receiving the truth, or the doing of their Duty, when it will expose them to reproach and opprobrious nicknames. Thus our *Servant* said of the *Jews*, John 9. 14. *How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God?*

When therefore Men tell us, it will be a *Scandalous* thing for them now to conform, they often mean nothing else by it, but that it will be unhandſom, and a diſgraceful thing for them to change their mind, and confeſs their miſtake, and retract what they have ſo long, and ſo Zealouſly defended. Or elſe let them look well, that it is not ſome paltry ſecular intereſt, that lies at the bottom, they dare not offend their *weak Brethren*, that is, they are afraid they ſhall loſe their Trade, they ſhall diſoblige many of their good Customers, they get their livelyhood by ſuch a Congregation, and therefore they muſt continue of it. But this is truly to become the ſervants of Men, ſuch as theſe are the moſt rank Men-pleaſers, and therefore it is good advice of Mr. Baxter in his *Cure of Church diviſions*, p. 141. *Pleaſe men in all things lawful for their good and Edification; and become all things to all men in a lawful way. But depart not from the principles or practice of Chriſtian Union, Communion, Charity, or Sobriety; to pleaſe a dividing bot-brain'd Party; nor to eſcape their ſharpeſt cenſures.*

13. If to diſpleaſe our *weak Brethren* were the ſinful offending him, condemned by St. Paul, it would prove an intolerable Yoke upon Mens Conſciences, would beget endleſs perplexities and difficulties, ſo that we ſhould not be able to do any thing, tho' never ſo indifferent, with a quiet and well-aſſured mind, ſince as the World now is, ſome one or other will, in this ſenſe be *Scandalized* at it. By doing we ſhall anger ſome, by forbearing we ſhall provoke others; and ſince thoſe, who call themſelves *weak*, are divided and ſhatter'd into ſeveral Sects and Factions, each condemning all the other, it is impoſſible for us to comply with any one of them, but we ſhall thereby diſpleaſe all the reſt. He therefore, that would with a good Conſcience perform his duty, in whatever place he lives, or relation he ſtands in, muſt diſpleaſe both good and bad Men, as things now are
amongſt

amongst us. *It is a very small thing, as St. Paul tells us, to be judged of Men, when they pass their unwarrantable censures upon us, and our actions; and they, who govern themselves by the opinions and fancies of others, can never tell whicher they shall be led by this principle. They are slaves to the Party they espouse, and must run with them into all the Folly and Extravagance they can be guilty of; or if at least they are forced to leave them, they shall in the end be more hated and despised by them, than if they had never humoured them at all.*

4. I add only, that according to this Rule, that we must not do any thing which may displease or grieve our *weak Brethren*, we do in effect submit our Judgments and Consciences to the Conduct of the most ignorant and injudicious Christians, and yield to them that Power and Authority over us, which we deny to the Magistrate and our Lawful Superiours; and it cannot but seem a very hard case, that they who are so tender of their Christian liberty, and think it so highly infringed and violated by the determinations of their Superiours about indifferent matters, should yet suffer themselves to be thus straitly tied up by the wills and passions of their *weak Brethren*. *If this were so, saith Mr. Baxter, p. 134. of the forenamed Book, the most Childish and Womanish sort of Christians, who have the weakest judgments, and the strongest wills and passions must rule all the World; for these are hardest pleased, and no man must displease them.* Whatever condescension therefore may be due to the *weak* and ignorant, yet it was never intended that they should govern the wiser, and better instructed Christians in all their actions; and who can Govern more Absolutely, than they whose wills must never be crossed, and whom none must displease? From all this I conclude, that this cannot be the sense of *Scandalizing or giving Offence, viz. doing of something which another takes ill, or is angry with us for it.*

2. I am now in the Second place to shew, what is the true meaning of *Offending or Scandalizing* in Scripture. The Greek word which we Translate *Scandal* or *Offence* signifies either a Trap and Snare, and else more commonly something laid in the way of another, which occasions his stumbling

or falling, by which he is bruised and hurt, and so consequently, whatever it was that hindred Men from becoming Christs Disciples, or discouraged them in their new Profession, or tempted them to forsake that Faith they had lately embraced, is called a *Scandal* or *Offence*. It is sometimes rendred an *occasion to fall*, as Rom. 14. 13. *occasion of stumbling*, as 1 *Job*. 2. 10. a *stumbling-block*, Revel. 2. 14. or a *thing that doth offend*, as St. *Matt*. 13. 41. In all which places there is the same Original word.

Hence to *Offend* or *Scandalize* any one, as it is commonly used in the New Testament, is to do something, which tends to estrange or fright Men from the Christian Profession, to beget in them hard and unworthy thoughts of it, or is apt, when they are converted, to turn them from it, and make them repent of their change. Of this I shall give some few instances out of the Discourses of our Saviour and his Apostles.

Thus our Blessed Lord, St. *Matth*. 17. 27. is said to have paid tribute, lest he should *Offend* or *Scandalize* the Jews. This was more than he was bound to: for he tells us, *the Children are free*. But he did it, that he might not give any occasion to his Enemies to represent him to the People, as a contemner of their Law, or an Enemy to *Cæsar*, (according as you understand that Tribute to be paid either to the Romans or the Temple) and so prejudice them against his Person and Doctrine. This our Saviours own Country-men, who were acquainted with his Father, and Mother, and Kindred, who knew the meanness of his Birth and Education, *Mark* 6. 3. were *Offended* or *Scandalized* at him. They were astonished at the great things he did, and the greater things he spoke, and would in all probability have believed on him, had they not known his mean Original and Employment. *It is not this the Carpenter, the Son of Mary, &c.* After the same manner, when our Lord, St. *John* 6. 61. had discoursed of *eating the Flesh of the Son of Man*, they that heard him, taking it in a gross carnal sense, were *Offended* or *Scandalized* at him. They began to doubt of his being a true Prophet, or the Messiah, who would teach his Disciples to turn Cannibals.

Thus.

Thus again our Saviour, before the night in which he was betrayed told his Disciples, *St. Matt. 26. 31. all of ye shall be Offended or Scandalized, because of me this Night*; that is, shall fly away and shamefully forsake me, when you behold my hard usage, and dismal sufferings. So *Christ Crucified*, 1 Cor. 1. 23. *to the Jews was a Scandal or stumbling-block*; that is, they had set their minds and hearts on a temporal earthly King, and expected to be freed from the Roman Yoke, and to be restored to their former Dominions and greatness, as the effect of the coming of their Messiah, and therefore could not be perswaded to own him for their Prince, and Saviour, and the Son of God, who was put to such a Cursed and Ignominious death. In the same sense they who heard the Word of God, *Mark 4. 17. and received it with gladness, but having no root in themselves, when Affliction or Persecution arose for the Words sake, were presently offended or Scandalized*; that is, were ready to leave and renounce that Profession, that was likely to cost them so dear.

After the publishing of the Gospel by the Apostles, that which most stumbled the Jewish Converts, was the danger *Moses's Law* and their Temple Worship, and the singular preeminences of the Seed of *Abraham*, seemed to be in of being undermined by Christianity. They were strangely wedded to their Legal observances, fond of Circumcision and those peculiarities, which distinguished their Nation from the rest of mankind, they were jealous of any Doctrine, that encroached upon their Privileges, or tended to bring them down to the same level with the Uncircumcised World. This mightily Offended them, and hardened them against Christianity; whereas on the other side, the Gentile Converts with as much reason, were afraid of putting their Necks under so heavy a Yoke, or being brought into subjection to the Jewish Law, and there was no such effectual way to scare them from Christianity, as when it came attended with the burden of the Mosaical Ceremonies; which were an Offence to them; that is, did discourage them from believing in Christ, or continuing in his Faith. Now to prevent the mischiefs, that might arise from these different apprehensions amongst the Christian Proselytes, was the occasion

occasion of the meeting of that first Council at Jerusalem, mentioned *Acts* 15. and of those directions which St. Paul gives *Rom.* 14. concerning our behaviour towards weak Brethren.

Another case there was concerning eating of things offered to Idols, of which St. Paul discourseth in his first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, chap. 8. and 10. The sum of which seems to be this, that the stronger and wiser Christians ought to abstain from eating what had been offered to Idols, tho as ordinary meat, in the presence of any one, who with Conscience of the Idol, did eat it as a thing offered to an Idol. For such there were in the Church of Corinth so weak, as not yet to have quite left off their Idolatrous Worship, and a Christians eating what had been Offered in Sacrifice before such an one, might serve to harden, and confirm him in his Error, whose Conscience being weak is defiled. Of whose Soul St. Paul professed himself to have so great regard, that he would eat no such meat as long as the World lasted, rather than lay such a stumbling-block before, or wound their weak Consciences. In all these places, and many more that might be named (for the fuller explication of which I refer you to Interpreters, and those that have written largely on this subject) no less than Apostacy from the Christian Faith, was the sin, into which these weak Christians were so apt to fall, and by an undue use of our Liberty to give occasion to others forsaking the Christian Religion, whereby our Saviour loseth a Disciple, and the Soul of our Brother perisheth, is the proper sin of Offending, or giving Scandal.

I shall mention but one place more, which is *Revel.* 2. 14. where Balaam is said to have taught Balac, to cast a stumbling-block or Scandal before the Children of Israel, which relates to his enticing them by the Daughters of Moab to Fornication and Idolatry, and by that means provoking God against them. So that in the most general sense to Scandalize or Offend any one, is, to give occasion to his sin, and consequently his ruin and undoing; and this I suppose will be granted by all, that do not receive their opinions from the meer sound of words. Hence I shall conclude these few things.

I. The better Men are, the harder it is to Scandalize them: These

Those are not such Godly persons, as they would be thought, who are so ready at all turns to be *Offended*; for how can they be reckon'd to excel others in knowledg or goodness, who are so easily upon every occasion drawn or tempted to sin? Thus Mr. Baxter himself tells the Separatists in his *Cure of Church Divisions*. Usually, saith he, men talk most against *Scandalizing* those, whom they account to be the best, and the best are least in danger of sinning; and so they accuse them to be the worst, or else they know not what they say; for suppose a Separatist should say, if you hold Communion with any Parish Minister or Church in England, it will be a Scandal to many good people: I would ask such an one, Why call you those good people that are easily drawn to sin against God? Nay, that will sin because I do my duty: Therefore if you know what you say, you make the Separatists almost the worst of men, that will sin against God, because another will not sin.

The great thing our Nonconformists pretend unto above other men, is tenderness of Conscience; by which they must mean, if they mean any Vertue by it, a great fear of doing any thing that is evil; and this, where it is in truth, is the best security that can be devised against being *Scandalized* or *Offended*, by what other Men do; that is, against being drawn into sin by it. So that they do really disparage and leverely reflect upon the *Dissenters*, who are thus afraid of giving them *Offence*, as I have explained it.

2. No man can with sense say of himself, that he shall be *Scandalized* at what another man does; for it is as much as to say, that by such a person and action, he shall be led into sin ignorantly, and his saying this confutes his ignorance: If he knows it to be a sin, he is not betrayed into it, nor doth he fall into it through ignorance and mistake (which is the case of those that are *Scandalized*) but wilfully commits it. This a great Bishop compares with the peevishness of a little Child, who when he is commanded to pronounce the word he hath no mind to, tells you he cannot pronounce that word, at the same time naming the word he pretends he cannot speak. Such Nonsense it is for a man to forbid me doing any thing upon pretence it will be a *Scandal* to him, or make him through mistake fall into some sin,

sin, when by this it is plain that he knows of it before hand, and so may, and ought to avoid the stumbling-block, that is laid before him, and the danger that he is exposed unto. Surely saith Solomon, Prov. 1. 17. *in vain is the Net spread in the sight of any Bird.*

If to Offend or Scandalize any one, is to tempt and draw him into some sin, whereby his Conscience is wounded, there then can be no fear of giving Offence by our Conformity to the orders and usages of our Church, because there is nothing appointed by or used in it, but what may be complied withal without sin : For this, as I before observed, is supposed in the Question I at first propounded to discourse of; that he, who absented from his Parish Church for fear of Offending his weak Brethren, was convinced in his own mind of the lawfulness of all that is enjoyn'd ; and therefore by his own Conformity, he can only engage others to do as he hath done, which as long as he is persuaded to be lawful, I do not see how he can be afraid of Scandalizing others by it, or making them to sin by his Example, unless he will imagine his Brethren, not so weak, but so wicked, as to worship the Host, because he Kneels at receiving of the Sacrament, and to adore the Cross because he bows at the Name of Jesus, or that they will renounce all Religion because he hath forsaken their ways of Separation : This cannot but prove a vain excuse for me to forbear doing that, in which there is really no evil, lest by the Authority of my example I make others sin in doing the same innocent action ; which in this case is so far from being to be feared, that if by my example I prevail with others to return into the Communion of our Church, they are not thereby at all Scandalized, but I have done them a most signal kindness and benefit.

If it be said, that tho what I do is in it self lawful, yet it may minister occasion or provocation to others to do something else that is unlawful, and so I become truly guilty of giving Offence ; I Answer, that we are accountable only for the natural tendencies, or probable effects of our actions, which may be easily foreseen and prevented. Remote probabilities and contingencies and bare possibilities come

come not into reckoning, nor are they at all to be weighed. If in every action I am bound to consider what advantage a wicked sensual Man, or a weak silly man might take, and what Arguments he might possibly thence draw to encourage himself in sin and folly, or excuse himself from the care of his Soul and Religion, this would open the door to infinite Scrupulosity and trouble, and I should hardly be able to do or speak any thing without the incurring the guilt of giving *Scandal*. Now this being supposed, I dare boldly challenge any Man to name any one sin either against God, our Neighbour, or our selves, that our Conformity doth give any real probable occasion unto; and it is very uncharitable to conceit, that our Nonconforming Brethren will out of meer perverseness, or spite and revenge run into sin, on purpose to make our leaving them criminal and vicious; which if any should be so wicked as to do, yet they would lose the design of their malice, and prove the only guilty persons themselves.

The only thing I imagine can be further said in this case, is, that tho I am well satisfied my self, yet by my Conformity I may tempt and provoke others that are not satisfied concerning the lawfulness of it, nay those who judge it absolutely sinful, yet rather than stand out, or being moved by the opinion they have of my goodness and Wisdom, to follow my example with a doubting or gainsaying Conscience. Suppose a Master of a Family that used to frequent the private Meetings, and his Wife and Children and Servants used to follow him thither; but afterwards, by reading of such good Books as have been lately written, is himself satisfied concerning the lawfulness of going to Church, and at last thinks it his duty so to do, only he is afraid that the rest of his Family to please and humour him, will be apt also to forsake the private Meetings, and go along with him to Church, tho it be altogether against their judgment and Conscience: Or suppose him a man of eminency amongst his Neighbours, on whose favour many do depend, of great interest and reputation, by whose example many are sway'd and led. Tho himself doth conform upon good reasons and principles, yet his example may invite many others to it,

tho they have received no satisfaction concerning the lawfulness of it.

Now here I desire these three things may be considered.

1. It is certain that it is as unlawful to go to the Separate Meetings against ones Conscience, as it is to go to the publick Church against ones Conscience. Why then ought not this man to be as afraid, when he leaves his Parish-Church and frequents the private Congregation, lest he should draw some to follow him thither with a doubting Conscience; as well as he fears, if he leaves the Meetings and resorts to his Parish-Church, some not satisfied concerning the lawfulness of it, should come after him thither? The influence of his Example, interest, reputation, is the same in both instances; the danger of giving this *Scandal* is equal; that therefore which ought to determine his practice must be his own Judgment and perswasion.

2. Such an one, who hath been a Separatist, but is now himself satisfied of the lawfulness of Conformity, ought to take great care and pains in endeavouring to satisfie others also, especially those, whom he hath any cause to think to have been led into the ways of Separation by his example: He must not be ashamed to own his former mistake, to set before them the reasons on which his change is grounded, and must do this publicly and frequently, perswading others to use the same helps and means, which were so effectual for his own conviction. And thus he doth all that lieth in his power to prevent this ill effect, and shall not be further answerable for the consequences of what he doth.

3. It is truly observed by some, that considering the known temper of the *Nonconformists*, it is not very likely any such mischief should ensue, viz. that by the example of one or more leaving their Separate Assemblies, others should be moved to follow them against their own Judgment and Conscience. It is abundantly notorious how they have used to treat those that have deserted them; with what irreconcilable enmity they have prosecuted them, looking upon them as their worst Enemies, passing more grievous censures upon them than upon those who have all their lives long continued in our Communion.

4. I proceed in the last place to observe from what I have discoursed concerning giving Offence, that if to Offend any one, be to lead him into sin, then we may Scandalize and give Offence to others, as soon by pleasing them and complying with them, as by displeasing them and going contrary to their mind and humour.

St. Paul, who Circumcised *Timothy*, *Acts* 16. 3. in favour of the *weak Jews*, that he might insinuate and ingratiate himself into them, refused to Circumcise *Titus*, *Galat.* 2. 3. tho he made the *Jews* angry by it, yet he would not give place by subjection, or submission and condescension to them, *no not for an hour*: He considered the different states and conditions of the persons he had to deal withal. He complied to Circumcise *Timothy*, lest all the *Jews* with him should have forsaken the Christian Faith, and for the same reason he denied to Circumcise *Titus*, lest those of *Jerusalem* should think he was of opinion, that the Jewish Law held still in force, and so the Cross of Christ should become of no effect to them. He pleased indeed the former for fear of driving them from Christianity, and for the same reason he displeased the latter, lest he should give them occasion to think the observation of *Moses's* Law always necessary. He had truly Scandalized them, if he had done as they would have had him: He had Offended them in the true Scripture sense, if he had pleased and humoured them; and this is the most ordinary way of Scandalizing Christians amongst us, by not plainly telling Men of their faults and mistakes, by not speaking freely and roundly to them, nor acting courageously, whereby they become hardened and confirmed in their folly and ignorance.

To this purpose I cannot but repeat the words of Mr. *Baxter* in the Book I have so often cited; *Many a time*, saith he, *I have the rather gone to the Common-Prayers of the publick Assemblies for fear of being a Scandal to those same men that called the going to them a Scandal: that is, for fear of hardning them in a sinful Separation and Error; because I knew that was not Scandal which they called Scandal; that is, displeasing them, and crossing their opinions; but hardning them in an Error or other sin, is true Scandalizing. Understand this, or*

you will displease God under pretence of avoiding Scandal,
p. 135.

Thus by complying with our Dissenting Brethren we really do them that mischief which we would avoid, and fall into the sin of giving *Scandal*, whilst we are running from it; We countenance and encourage their sinful Separation and Division; we confirm them in their dangerous Errors and Mistakes; we by our practice condemn those things, which yet in our Consciences we allow and approve of; and by our Authority and influence harden others in their unreasonable prejudices and opposition against the lawful Commands of their Superiours. They think us of the same mind with themselves, whilst we do the same things, and that we judge as ill of the Church of *England*, as long as we refuse to Communicate with it, as themselves do; and thus we give occasion to their sin, and those infinite mischiefs which have happened both to Church and State upon the account of our Religious disputes and divisions; which surely ought to be well thought of and considered by a sort of Men amongst us, who shall go to Church in the Morning, and to a Conventicle in the Afternoon; who halt between both, and would fain displease neither side, but indeed give real *Offence* to both. From all this I think it is very plain, that he, who is satisfied in his own mind of the lawfulness of Conformity, but is afraid of giving *Offence* by it, if he be true to this principle, ought to hasten the faster to his Parish Church, that he might not *Offend* those very Dissenters of whom he would seem to be so tender; and thus I have done with the Second thing I propounded to shew, what is meant by *Offending* or *Scandalizing*.

3. It remaineth in the Third and Last place to enquire; how far, and in what instances we are bound to consider the ignorance or *weakness* of our Brother? In Answer to this, that I may proceed with all the clearness I can, I shall now suppose notwithstanding all I have already said, that our *Dissenting Brethren* are truly *weak* persons, and that there may be some danger of their being through their own fault *Offended* by our Conformity; yet taking this for granted, I shall plainly shew that he, who is in his own mind convinced

ced of the lawfulness of coming to his Parish Church, and using the Forms of Prayer and Ceremonies by Law appointed, ought not to forbear doing the same for fear of giving such Offence to his weak Brethren. There are many other things to be considered in this Case, besides this matter of private Scandal; and if there be greater evil in, and greater mischief to others, and a more publick Scandal doth follow our forbearing Communion with the Church and withdrawing into private Assemblies, than can happen by our leaving them and returning to the Church, and complying with its orders, we ought then to conform notwithstanding the Offence that is imagined may be taken at it. For these two things, as I suppose, are agreed on all hands; one is, that nothing which is sinful may be done to avoid Scandalizing others; the other is, that to avoid a less Scandal being taken by a few, we must not give a greater Scandal and of vastly more pernicious consequence to a much bigger number of persons; and by these two Rules I shall now judge of the Case at first propounded.

I. Nothing that is sinful may be done to avoid others being Scandalized, which is directly the Apostles Doctrine, Rom. 14. 13. *That we must not do evil, that good may come*; nor is any necessary duty to be omitted out of prudence or charity to others, lest they through Error or Ignorance be hurt by it. We must not to prevent the greatest sin in another, commit the less sin our selves, nor disobey Gods Law, and so run the hazard of our own damnation, tho it be to save the Soul of our Brother. Thus Calvin tells us, *Instit. lib. 3. c. 19. Quæ necessaria sunt factu, nullius offendiculi timore omittenda sunt. Whatever is necessary to be done by virtue of Gods Command is not to be omitted for fear of Offence*; and again in the same place, *Hic Charitativè rationem haberi decet, sed usque ad ultimum. Our Charity to our Brother ought to be limited by this, that we do not for his sake displease God.*

The very best things and actions may be perverted by Men of ill-disposed or weak minds, false consequences and unjust inferences may be strained from them; as we know the grace of God in the Gospel was abused into an argument for licentiousness, and Christ himself is said to be set
for

for the fall of many, St. Luke 2. 24. but still this doth not Cancel our obligations to universal obedience to Gods Law, nor can it alter the nature of good and evil, duty and sin; which are no such uncertain contingent things, as to depend upon the constructions others shall make of our actions, or the conclusions they shall draw from them. God Almighty in the making of his Laws hath a perfect comprehension of all the accidental events, that may happen either through the weakness or wickedness of Men; and we must not think our selves to be wiser than God, taking upon our selves to dispense with his Commands without any allowance from him, as if himself had not foreseen those inconveniences which may arise from our doing our duty: it can therefore never be, that obedience to God should give any real *Scandal*; and whatever *Offence* may be taken at my doing of my duty, it is a contradiction to imagine it imputable to me, as a sin or fault, (for it is to suppose one to disobey God, in obeying him) but they alone are chargeable who are *Offended* by it.

Now by the express Command of God, we are obliged to obey the lawful injunctions of our Superiours, whether Civil or Ecclesiastical; and if any are so hardy as to deny this, they must seek for another *Bible* out of which to judge of Gods will; for there is hardly any one duty of Religion more plainly Commanded, more frequently and earnestly pressed in the New Testament, than quiet and peaceable subjection to Authority, both in Church and State, in all things lawful, and that not only to avoid punishment, but for Conscience sake; and to refuse obedience in such things, is a sin against the fifth Commandment. That the Conformity required by our Church, contains not any thing in it unlawful, must be granted, as I have already observed, by all those who make use of this Plea of *Scandal*, from all which the necessary Conclusion is.

Since we may not redeem a *Scandal* by disobedience to God, since God hath plainly required our submission to those whom he hath set over us in all things lawful; since it is acknowledged by those I now discourse with, that Conformity to the Church is enjoined by a competent Authority,

ty,

ty, and is lawful; I say the necessary conclusion is, that no Man can with a good Conscience refuse to conform only for fear of *Scandal*.

Our *Dissenting Brethren*, when they are urged with this Argument neither do nor can deny any of the Premises, they must confess that no sin may be committed upon any account whatsoever, and that a Man is not bound to provide for his Brothers safety by wounding his own Soul; they cannot deny but that God hath Commanded us to be subject to Lawful Authority in all things lawful, but then to evade the force of this reasoning, they have endeavoured to load the conclusion with some seeming difficulties and absurdities, which they pretend follow from this principle, that we are bound to obey, notwithstanding the *Scandal* that may ensue upon it. The chief of these I shall mention, and briefly return an Answer to them.

I. It is pleaded that *those precepts, which contain only Rituals, are to give place to those, which do concern the welfare of Mens Bodies, and much more to those, which do respect the welfare of our Brothers Soul; so that, when both together cannot be observed, we must neglect or violate the former, to observe the latter*: That this is true even of some Commands given by God himself; to which purpose our Saviour doth produce that saying of the Prophet Hosea, *I will have Mercy and not Sacrifice*. Now if *Sacrifices* prescribed by God himself, which were so considerable a part of the Divine Worship under Moses's Law, yet were to give place to acts of mercy, how much more are the positive injunctions of Men, that concern only the externals and circumstantial of Religion, to yield to the Royal and indispensable Law of Charity, of which this duty of not giving Offence to others, is such an Eminent part. Thus saith Mr. *Jeans* in his Second Part of *Scholastical Divinity*, *What Laws of any Earthly Wight whatsoever concerning Ceremonies can be more obligatory, than the Commands of God touching the externals of his Worship and Service; and yet it is his will and pleasure, that these externals of his Worship should be laid aside for the performance of outward works of mercy: If therefore the sacred Ordinances of God are to give way unto works of mercy unto the bodies of Men, surely then*

then much more is the craft of human inventions to yield unto a work of mercy to the Souls of Men.

In answer to this, it is readily acknowledged that when there doth happen any such interfering between two Commands of God, the one Positive, the other Moral, the Positive ought always to give place to the Moral; and by the same reason the Positive Commands of our Superiours ought certainly to give way to the Moral Commands of God, which are of eternal and immutable obligation. They cease to bind us either in case of absolute necessity, or when they plainly hinder our performance of any Moral Duty to God or our Neighbour; and the Church is presumed to dispence with its orders, as God Almighty doth allow the neglect of his own positive Institutions in such Circumstances. But then this is only, where the necessity is urgent and extream, the sin we must otherwise commit evident and certain; and at last our Obedience is dispensed withal only for that one time.

Thus in a case of necessity, Our Saviour St. Math. 12. 5. acquits David and his followers of all blame, who being ready to perish for hunger, did eat of the Shew-bread, which otherwise, was not lawful for them to eat; but had they taken a particular fancy to that Bread, and refused to have eaten of any other, because that best agreed with their Stomachs and was most pleasing to their Palate; can we think our Saviour would have so easily excused them? Or which is nearer to our Case; because God did prefer acts of Mercy before Sacrifices where both could not be done, yet this would not have justified any mans wholly leaving off Sacrificing, or refusing to do it at Jerusalem, inventing another way of Worship, as more expedient than Sacrificing, or choosing another place to Sacrifice in, which might be more convenient for all the Jews than that City was. We may leave our Prayers, forsake the Church to save the life of our Neighbour, or to quench the firing of his House, but still this would be but a piteyful pretence for our wholly absenting our selves from Church, and constant neglect of our Prayers, because in the mean time our Neighbours life may be invaded, or his house fired by ill Men, of which there

there is great store in the World, and so he may stand in need of our help, which is a more acceptable Service to God than any acts of Devotion. So that however this Argument may serve to excuse the omission of some things Commanded by lawful Authority, by those who otherwise are perfectly conformable, in extraordinary cases which very rarely happen, and for which no provision could be made by Law; yet to be sure this will not at all help those, who bid open defiance to the Laws, stand out in manifest opposition against them, live in plain disobedience and contradiction to them, as if they were altogether free from them; nay, set up a distinct way and form of Worship of their own, and all this because they are loth to *Offend* those, who are not satisfied of the wisdom and goodness of what is appointed.

Thus our Dissenting Brethren can gain but little by this Plea if granted to them; for upon this account of exercising mercy and charity towards their Neighbours, they can be excused from Obedience to their Superiours in such cases only, in which they may be excused also from the observation of the Sabbath, from Prayer publick or private, from Worshipping of God either in the Church or in a Conventicle; nay, from Obedience to God himself; had he pleased in the Scriptures positively to have required whatever is at present enjoined by our Church; and let them well consider, whether if God had plainly in his Word prescribed all that our Church doth Command, they would have thought it safe to have refused compliance with such divine impositions, because they were unreasonably *offensive* to some Godly people: If our *Dissenters* will but acknowledge themselves bound to submit to the determinations of their Superiours about the things in controversie between us, so far, as the *Jews* were bound to obey the ordinances of God concerning his external Worship delivered by *Moses*; and that they are freed from such obligation to obey the Laws of their Governours only such in cases, as the *Jews* were excused from offering their accustomed Sacrifices, or as they think themselves at liberty to break the Sabbath, to omit Gods publick Worship, I suppose this dispute will soon be at

an end, for they dare not own, that the *Scandal* others may take at such things, which yet are to give place to moral Duties, is sufficient to void their Obligation to the doing of them.

Mr. *Feans* (whose objections I shall the rather consider because of his eminency amongst the *Presbyterians*, tho' I find my self somewhat prevented by a late Writer, who hath taken particular notice of them) thus putteth the Question, Suppose, saith he, the greatest Monarch upon the face of the Earth should command the meanest and lowest of his Slaves, upon some important affair to ride Post through such a City, without any of the least stay or diversion, and that it should happen that a Company of little Children should be playing in the Streets, can this Slave think that he is obliged to ride over them? No surely, he ought to use all means, and take all care possible to execute his Commission without doing any hurt, or damage to any person whatever; but if he would have stated the case right, it should have been done thus; Suppose this Slave should utterly refuse to do as he was commanded, and for his justification should plead, that he must be forced to ride through many Towns and Cities, where are many little Children, who are often playing at the Doors or in the Streets; he knows not but that some of them may be in his way, or chance to run between his Horses Legs, and therefore to avoid the doing of this mischief, which might possibly happen, he resolves not to stir one foot from his own home. Is this pretence sufficient to excuse his disobedience? No more can our Nonconfirmation to the rules given us by our Superiours be innocent, because some may be *Scandalized* at our Obedience.

2. It is further said that *Scandal* is in the nature of it Spiritual Murder, and if where Authority hath determined our choice, we must hold to their determination, any *Scandal* to the contrary notwithstanding, it seemeth then in case the Magistrate command it, we may lawfully murder the Soul of our Brother, wound his weak Conscience, and destroy with our Meats, our Ceremonies, the work of God, and him for whom Christ died. It is good, saith St. Paul, Rom. 14. 21. neither to eat Flesh, nor to drink Wine, nor any thing whereby thy Brother stumbleth, or

is offended, or is made weak. But our Prelatists, saith Mr. Jeans, determine quite otherwise. If Authority enjoyn it, it is good, say they, to eat Bread, drink Wine, wear a Surplice, use the sign of the Cross in Baptism, tho' thereby never so many Brethren stumble, or are offended, or made weak.

But all this is meer bugbear, fitted only to fright Children and such weak persons, as we are now treating of; for it can never be shewn, how wearing a Surplice, or Kneeling at receiving of the Sacrament, or crossing the Infants forehead, hath any tendency towards the scaring Men from Christianity, or making them to deny Christ, and forsake and grow weary of his Religion, which I have sufficiently proved to be the only proper *Scandalizing* of our Brother, which St. Paul so highly aggravateth, and chargeth with the guilt of destroying and murdering his Soul; none of these things do directly and immediately lead or tempt any man to any sin: Whatever *Scandal* may follow is wholly accidental, and the fault and mistake of those only, who are *Offended*, and to provide always against such *Scandals* is an impossible undertaking; for they may follow the most innocent actions, nay the most necessary duties, and this Argument concludes as strongly against obedience to any other Command of God, if by it my Brother may *stumble, or be offended, or be made weak*, as it doth against submission to our Superiours in things lawful.

They that make these Objections do not sufficiently consider, that by Gods Law we are bound to obey the Lawful Commands of our Superiours; and it is not only the Law or Ordinance of Man, of which they seem to make so little account, but it is the Law of God also, that is violated by our disobedience to our Governours in things Lawful: The Comparison therefore ought not to be only, as they make it, between an humane Authority determining some indifferent things, and the divine Law of Charity to the Soul of our Brother, but between the divine Command of obedience to our Superiours, and the avoiding of *Scandal*: Here we affirm, that we cannot be bound to transgress a plain Law of God, or which is all one in this Question, a lawful command of our Superiours for fear of some evil that may

by chance happen to some others through their own fault; and we prove it by this reason, which our Dissenting Brethren must own for true and good, because every one is bound to have a greater care of his own than others Salvation, and consequently rather to avoid sin in himself, than to prevent it in his Brethren.

If it be here asked, as it is by some, whether any humane Authority can make that action cease to be Scandalous, which if done without any such Command had been criminal upon the account of the Scandal that followed it, I Answer, that no Authority, whether divine or humane, can secure that others shall not be Offended by what I do out of obedience to their Commands, but then it doth free me from all guilt and blame, by making that to become my duty to do, which if I had done needlessly without any great reason, and my Brother had been hurt and his Conscience wounded by it, might have been justly charged with uncharitableness, greater or less according as the Scandal was more or less probable to follow.

This must be granted, that the Laws of God or Man, otherwise obligatory, do not lose their binding force because of some Scandal, that may possibly happen from our Compliance with them, or else all Authority is utterly void and insignificant, and every Man is at liberty to do all things as himself pleaseth; for, to borrow the words of the excellent Bishop Sanderson, *To allow Men under pretence that some offence may be taken thereat, to disobey Laws and Constitutions made by those that are in Authority over us, is the next way to cut the sinews of all Authority, and to bring both Magistrates and Laws into contempt; for what Law ever was made, or can be made so just and reasonable, but some Man or other either did or might take offence thereat.* Whether such a Constitution or Command of our Superiours be Scandalous or no, every one must judge for himself; and so according to his own private opinion of the goodness or hurtfulness of what is required, he is free to obey it or not, which is directly to dissolve all Government, and to bring in certain disorder and everlasting confusion, every one doing what is good in his own Eyes.

3. It is said, that *Avoiding of Scandal is a main duty of charity*; May Superiours therefore at their pleasure appoint, how far I shall shew my charity towards my Brethrens Soul; then surely an inferiour Earthly Court may cross the determinations of the High Court of Heaven: This Mr. Jeams urgeth also out of Amesius; but it is easily replied,

That here is no Crossing the determinations of God, since it is his expresse will, that in all lawful things we should obey our Governours, and he who hath made this our duty, will not lay to our charge the mischiefs, that may sometimes without our fault through the folly and peevishness of Men follow from it, and certainly it is as equal and reasonable, that our Superiours should appoint how far I shall exercise my charity towards my Brethren, as it is, that the mistake and prejudice of any private Christians should set bounds to their Power and Authority, Cancel the publick Laws, or that every ignorant and froward Brother should determine, how far we shall be obedient to those, whom God hath set over us, either in Church or State.

But to give a more full Answer to this we must know, that, tho' charity be the great duty, especially of the Christian Religion, yet duties of justice (as they are commonly called) are of stricter obligation than duties of charity, and we are bound to pay our debts, before we give an alms. Now obedience to Superiours is a debt we owe to them, which they have right to exact of us, so that they may accuse us of injury, if we perform it not. But a great care to hinder sin in others, or not to scandalize them is a duty of charity, which indeed we are obliged unto as far as we can, but not till after we have given to every one what is his due and right. *It is therefore no more Lawful for me, saith the forenamed most Judicious Bishop Sanderson, to disobey the lawful Command of a Superiour, to prevent thereby the offence of one or a few Brethren, then it is lawful for me to do one man wrong to do another man a courtesie withal; or than it is lawful for me to rob the Exchequer to relieve an Hospital.* According to that known saying of St. Austin, *Quis est qui dicat, ut habeamus quod demus pauperibus, faciamus furta divitibus?* Who is it, that saith it is lawful to steal from the rich, what we may.

may bestow on the poor ? or to refuse to pay Taxes, on pretence that you know those who have more need of your money ?

To this Mr. *Jeans* replies, *Suppose*, saith he, *the care of not giving offence be in respect of our Brother but a debt of charity, yet in regard of God it is a legal debt, since he may and doth challenge it as due, and we do him wrong if we disobey him :* Here I grant indeed, that both are required by God at our hands, that we should be obedient to our Superiours, and that we should be always ready to shew charity to our Brethren ; but then I say, this is not the charity which God requires, when I give to those in want, what is none of mine own. This is not an instance or expression of that love and kindness, which by the Law of God we owe to our Brother, to do him good by wronging our Superiours. God hath obliged Servants to be merciful to the poor to their power, as well as to be true and faithful to their Masters ; but that is no part of the mercy which God requires from them, to give away their Masters goods without his leave, tho' it were to those who stand in great need of relief. God hath Commanded all Christians to have a great care of being any occasion of their Brothers sin or fall ; but then this must necessarily be understood only of things subject to our own ordering and management. In all cases, wherein we are at our own disposal, we are bound charitably to regard our Brother. But in instances, where our practice is determined by Authority, our Superiours only are to consider the danger of Scandal ; we must consider the duty we owe to them, this being a matter wherein we cannot shew our charity without violating the right of our Superiours ; It remains then, in the words of another great Bishop, *in what case soever we are bound to obey God or Man, in that case and in that conjunction of circumstances we have nothing permitted to our choice, (and consequently there is no place for any act of charity) and have no Authority to remit of the right of God or our Superiour ; and to comply with our Neighbour in such Questions, besides that it cannot serve any purposes of piety, if it declines from duty in any instance, it is like giving Alms out of the portion of Orphans, or building Hospitals with the Money and spoils of Sacrilege.*

4. It is further said by Mr. *Jeames* out of *Amesius*, If determination by Superiours is sufficient to take away the sin of Scandal, then they do very ill, that they do not, so far as is possible, determine all things indifferent, that so no danger may be left of giving Offence by the use of them. Then the Church of Rome is to be praised in that she hath determined so many indifferent things. Then St. Paul might have spared all his directions about forbearance out of respect to weak Brethren, and fully determined the matters in debate, and so put an end to all fear of Scandal.

This truly seemeth a very odd way of arguing, and all that I shall say to it is, that it supposeth nothing else worthy to be considered in the making of Laws, or in the determinations of Superiours about indifferent things, but only this one matter of Scandal; and the project it self, should it take, would prove very vain and unsuccessful. For tho' we truly say, that we are bound to comply with the Orders and Ceremonies of the Church of *England*, they being but few and innocent, and so giving no real ground of Offence; yet we do not say the same upon supposition our Church had determined all circumstances in Gods Worship she possibly could, which would perhaps have been a yoke greater, than that of the Ceremonial Law to the *Jews*; nor if she had prescribed as many Ceremonies as the Church of *Rome* hath done, which manifestly tend to the disgrace and Scandal of our Christian Religion; and as for the course St. Paul took, it is plain that some things upon good reasons were determined by the Apostles, as that the Gentile Converts should abstain from blood, and things strangled, and offered to Idols, which decree, I presume, they might not Transgress out of charity to any of their Brethren, who might take Offence at such abstinence, and other things for great reason were for a time left at liberty, which reason was taken from the present circumstances of those the Apostles had to deal withal; tho' afterwards, as I observed before, when that reason ceased, determinations were made about those things which St. Paul had left at liberty, and if St. Paul had determined the dispute about meats and days one way, they, who had followed so great an Authority, whatever had happened, had surely been from the sin of Scandal; but still the Scandal

dal had not been prevented, but all the contrary part had been in danger to have been utterly estranged from Christianity; and that was reason sufficient why *St. Paul* did not make any determinations in that case. For Governours are not only to take care to free those that obey them from the sin of *Scandal*, but also to provide, that as little occasion, as is possible, may be given to any to be *Scandalized*.

There are other Objections offered by *Mr. Jeans*, out of *Amesius* and *Rutherford*, against this Doctrine of our obligation to obedience to our Superiours in things lawful, notwithstanding the *Scandal* that may follow; but they either may be Answered from what I have already said, or else they chiefly concern the case of Governours, and are brought to prove that they act uncharitably, and give great Offence contrary to *St. Pauls* Rules, who take upon them determinately to impose unnecessary Rites by which they know many good Men would be *Scandalized*, but this is not my present business to discourse of, tho' I cannot forbear saying these two things, which I think very easie to make out.

1. That our Church of *England* hath taken all reasonable care not to give any just offence to any sort of persons, and the offences that have been since taken at some things in our constitution could not possibly have been foreseen by those who made our first Reformation from Popery, and so they could not be any reason against the first establishment: Nor,

2. Are they now a sufficient reason for the alteration of it; unless we can imagine it reasonable to alter publick Laws made with great wisdom and deliberation as often as they are disliked by, or prove *offensive* to private persons. If this be admitted, there then can never be any settled Government and order in the Church; because there never can be any establishment, that will not be lyable to give such Offence. They who now take Offence at what the Church of *England* enjoyns, on the same or a like account, will take Offence at whatever can be enjoined, and the same pretences of *Scandal* will be good against any establishment they themselves

selves shall make; for tho' they will not use these reasons against their own establishment, yet in a short time others will take up their Weapons to fight against them, and what served to destroy the present Church will be as effectual to overthrow that, which shall be set up in its room: so that whatever alteration is made, if this be allowed for a sufficient ground of it, *viz.* to avoid the *Offence* that some Men take at the present constitution, yet still we shall be but where we were, and new *Offences* will arise, and so there must be continual changing and altering, to gratifie the unreasonable humours and fancies of Men; and should any one party of Dissenters amongst us get their Form of Government and Worship established by Law, I doubt not but they would Preach to us the very same Doctrine, we do now to them. They would tell us that private persons must bend and conform to the Laws, and not the Laws to private persons; that it was our own fault that we were *Offended*; that our *weakness* proceeded from our unwillingness to receive instruction; that the *weak* were to be governed, not to prescribe to their Governours; that we must not expect that what was with good reason appointed and ordered should be presently abrogated or changed out of compliance with Mens foolish prejudices and mistakes. It is sufficiently known how strict and rigorous both the Presbyterians and Independents are and have been where they have had any advantage, and what little consideration or regard they have had of their *Dissenting Brethren*, tho' they would have us so tender of them.

Thus much I think sufficient to shew that the Precept of Obedience to Superiours in things Lawful is more obligatory, than the Precept of avoiding *Scandal*; whence it follows that it is our duty to obey in such instances, tho' *Offence* may be taken at it, because no sin is to be committed for the avoiding *Scandal*.

I might from this head further argue, that if we must not commit any sin to avoid giving *Offence*, then it is not Lawful to Separate from our Parish-Churches upon that account; because all voluntary Separation from a Church, in which nothing that is unlawful is required as a condition of

Communion, is the sin of *Schism*, and that is a sin of the blackest dye and greatest guilt, noted in the *Scriptures* for an act of *Carnality*, a work of *the Flesh* and of *the Devil*; for the necessity of our coming to Church, and Worshipping God in the same publick place with our Neighbours, and submitting to the Government, Discipline and Customs of that particular Church we live in, doth not depend only upon the Statutes of the Realm which enforce it, and the Command of the Civil Magistrate who requires it; but by the Law of our Religion all needless Separation or Division amongst Christians, breaking into little Parties and Factions, *from whence comes strife, envying, confusion and every evil work*, is to be most carefully avoided, as the very bane of Christianity, the rending of Christs body, and as utterly destructive not only of the Peace, but of the Being of a Church. So that should all the Laws about Conformity and against Conventicles be rescinded and voided, should the Magistrate indulge or connive at the Separate Assemblies, yet still this would not make our joyning with them not to be sinful. Since to preserve the unity of Christians and one Communion, is the necessary duty of every member of the Church, and it can never be thought a justifiable thing, to cut off our selves from the Communion of the Church or the Body of Christ, out of compliance with any erring or ignorant Brethren. But the sinfulness of withdrawing from the Communion of our Church, either totally or in part, hath been so evidently shown in some late discourses written on that subject, that I do despair of convincing those of the danger of it, who can withstand the force of all that hath been already offered to them; I only conclude thus much, that there is far more of the sin of uncharitableness in such Separation and Division, than there can be in all the Offence that is imagined to be given by our Conformity.

From what I have already at large discoursed it plainly follows, that they are things meerly *indifferent*, not only in their own nature, but also in respect to us, in the use of which we are obliged to consider the *weakness* of our Brethren. What is our duty must be done, tho' *Scandal* follow

low it: What is evil and sinful ought to be left undone upon the score of a greater obligation, than that of *Scandal*; but now in matters, wherein our practise is not determined by any Command, we ought so to exercise our liberty, as if possible to avoid giving any *Offence* to our Brethren. This is an undoubted part of that charity, which one Christian ought always to be ready to shew to another, by admonition, instruction, good example, and by the forbearance of things Lawful, at which he foreseeth his Neighbour out of *weakness* will be apt to be *Scandalized*, to endeavour to prevent his falling into any sin or mischief; and this we teach and press upon our people as much as *Dissenters* themselves can, in obedience to St. Paul's rules about *meats and days*, things neither in themselves good or evil, nor determined by any Authority, and therefore they were every way a proper instance, wherein Christians might exercise their Charity and Compassion one to the other; and in such cases St. Paul declares, that he would rather wholly forego his liberty, than by these indifferencies endanger the Soul of his Brother; as in that famous place 1 Cor. 8. 13. *If Meat make my Brother to offend, I will eat no Flesh while the World standeth, lest I make my Brother to Offend*; where by *Flesh and Meat* is to be understood such as had been offered unto *Idols*, which tho' lawful for a Christian to eat at common Meals, yet the Apostle would wholly abstain from, rather than wound the weak Conscience of a Brother. If I by the Law of Charity (as the Reverend Bishop Taylour saith, *Great exemp. p. 429*) must rather quit my own Goods than suffer my Brother to perish, much rather must I quit my priviledge. And, We should ill die for our Brother, who will not lose a meal to prevent his Sin, or change a dish to save his Soul: and if the thing be indifferent to us, yet it ought not to be indifferent to us whether our Brother live or die.

After this manner do we profess our selves ready to do or forbear any thing in our own power, to win and gain our *Dissenting Brethren* to the Church. We grant that those, who conform, are obliged by this Law of charity not needlessly to vex and exasperate our *Dissenters*, nor to do

any thing which they are not bound to do, that may estrange them from the Church ; but to restrain themselves in the use of that liberty God and the Laws have left them, for the sake of Peace and out of condescension to their Brethren. We dare not indeed omit any duty we owe to God, or our Superiours either in Church or State, nor can we think it fit and reasonable, that our Apostolical Government, Excellent Liturgy, Orderly Worship of God used in our Church, should all be presently condemned and laid aside, as soon as some *Weak* men take *Offence* at them ; but in all other things, subject to our own ordering and disposal, we acknowledge our selves bound *to please our Brother for his good unto edification.*

I only add here, that this very rule of yielding to our Brother in things indifferent and undetermined ought to have some restrictions and limitations, several of which are mentioned by Mr. *Jeans*, whom I have so often named ; as First, That we are not to forbear these indifferent things, where there is only a possibility of *Scandal*, but where the *Scandal* consequent is probable : for otherwise *we should be at an utter loss and uncertainty in all our actions, and never know what to do.* Secondly, Our *weak* Brethren must have some probable ground for their imagination that what we do is evil and sinful, or else we must wear no Ribbands, nor put off our Hats, but come all to *Thou* and *Thee* ; and for this exception he gives this substantial reason, *That if we are to abstain from all indifferent things, in which another without probable ground imagineth that there is sin, the servitude of Christians under the Gospel would be far greater and more insolerable, than that of the Jews under the Mosaiical administration.* Thirdly, this must be understood of indifferent things that are of no very great importance ; for if it be a matter of some weight and moment, as yielding me some great profit, I must only for a while forbear it, until my Brother is better informed. Lastly, We must not wholly betray our Christian liberty to please peevish and froward People, or to humour our Neighbour in an erroneous and superstitious opinion ; for which he quotes Mr. *Calvin* who in his Comment upon 1 Cor. 8. 13. tells of some

some foolish Interpreters, that leave to Christians almost no use at all of things indifferent, upon pretence to avoid the Offence of Superstitious persons.

Now tho' all this is generally true, yet I think there are no certain unalterable rules to be laid down to direct our practise in this affair. For it being an exercise of Charity, must be determined by the measures of prudence according to circumstances, and we may as well go about to give certain rules for Mens charity in other cases, and fix the proportion, which every Man ought to give of his estate towards the relief of the poor, as positively to tell how far a Man must deny himself in the use of indifferent things, and forego his own liberty for the sake of his Brother, and so I end this head with those words of the learned Dr. Hammond in his little Treatise of Scandal: *This whole matter is to be referred to the Christians pious discretion or prudence, it being free to him either to abstain, or not to abstain, from any indifferent action (remaining such) according as that piety, and that prudence shall represent it to be most charitable and beneficial to other Mens Souls.* Thus I have done with the first proposition, that nothing sinful is to be committed to avoid scandalizing others.

2. I proceed now to the Second, that to avoid a less Scandal being taken by a few we must not give a greater Offence, and of vastly more pernicious consequence to a much bigger number of persons: Not that such a case can ever happen, wherein we must necessarily give just Offence to one side or other, and so are uncharitable, whether we do or forbear to do the same action; for then we should be under a necessity of sinning, which implies a contradiction, but yet it may and often doth happen, that some weak persons may take Offence at my doing, and others be more Offended at my forbearing to do the same thing, and thus whether I do it, or not, I shall give Offence, tho' not justly, nor through my own fault, to some one or other. In such circumstances therefore we are to consider, which way is given the greater and more dangerous Offence, and it can never be either prudence or charity to abstain from that, which may Scandalize

delize our Brother, when by forbearance a greater and more publick Scandal is ministred to others; for in this case we have greater reason on the account of Scandal it self to do, than to forbear that action, as all that write on this subject do and must acknowledge, and for which they usually quote that, saying of Bernard, *Prudenter advertendum est scandalum scandalo non emendari, &c.* We are prudently to mark that one Scandal is not mended by another; which kind of emendation we should practise, if to take off offence from one party, we give offence unto another.

This was the occasion of that famous Contest between the two great Apostles mentioned in the second Chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, St. Peter had freely conversed with the Gentile Christians, and had eat with them all kind of meats; but afterwards when certain believing Jews from Jerusalem, who were still Zealous for Moses's Law, and the distinction of meats, came to Antioch, out of fear of Offending them and occasioning their falling off from the Faith of Christ he abstained from that liberty, and withdrew from that conversation, which before he had without any scruple used; and all the believing Jews that were at Antioch followed his example, and separated themselves from their Gentile Brethren. Now St. Paul considering the greater Scandal and mischief, that would follow this pretended tenderness of St. Peter and his compliance with the Jewish Christians, and that it was a likely way not only to confirm them in their error, but also wholly to exclude the Gentiles from the Faith of Christ, and so to hinder Christian Religion being propagated in the World, he withstood Peter to the face, and chid him sharply for his imprudent behaviour, who to avoid Offending some of the weak Jews did give a far greater Offence, and of much more dangerous consequence to the Gentile Converts, of whom the Christian Church was chiefly to consist. In this case therefore of Scandal we are not only to regard one side or party of Men, but as the same St. Paul directs us, 1 Cor. 10. 32. *We must give none offence neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God.*

It would swell this discourse, much beyond my present design to set forth at large the many and great Scandals, which

which are given by those, who Separate from the Church of *England*; and I doubt not but if this matter was rightly considered, and we were but impartially careful to avoid giving all *Offence* to others, we should soon find our selves much more obliged upon this account of *Scandal* peaceably to communicate with our Church, than to continue divided from it. I shall hint at some few of the most obvious considerations, by which we may a little Judge which way the greater *Scandal* is given to *Christians* in general.

1. By leaving the Parish Churches and joyning to the Separate Assemblies, we do mightily establish and harden (as I have before observed) those Dissenters, with whom we associate, in their sinful Separation and Erroneous persuasion of the unlawfulness of conformity; for it is but reasonable with them to judge, that we do the same things for the same reasons with themselves; and this is the true *Scandalizing* of our *weak Brethren*, leading them into, or confirming them in an evil course. Whereas by our forsaking them and returning to the Church we may possibly incline some, that are sincere amongst them, to consider and suspect their own way, and enquire after the Arguments that prevail with us to conform, and they may begin to think that there is not so much evil in it as they have all along supposed, and thus our Authority or example may contribute something towards the gaining our Brethren.

2. Which also I have just mentioned before, whatever Sect or denomination of Dissenters we joyn with, we offend all the other Sects or Parties amongst them; for they agree, only in their opposition to the Church of *England*, but in other things they have their distinct Forms and Models of Worship, and Shibboleths, and they think as ill, and sometimes speak as hardly of one another, as they do of Conformists. Which would evidently appear, if any one sort of them should get the upper hand; the rest of them would all act as fiercely, and complain as loudly of that Party that did prevail, as they now do of the Church of *England*. Till therefore they all agree in one way and speak the same Language there is no reason why any one Sect of them should challenge our condescension to them, to the dissatisfaction and

and Offence of all the other Dissenters, who have as good a right to this Plea of *weakness* as themselves.

3. Hereby great Offence is given to all those who do conform; for this Separation from the Church is a publick condemning of the Government, Orders, Discipline, or Doctrine of our Church, and is apt to breed scruples and perplexities in well meaning, but less knowing members of it, and by degrees produces a distast or dislike of our Worship, and plainly hinders the efficacy of the ordinances of Christ as administered in our Church, whilst it creates prejudices in people against them as impure and corrupt; and why there should not be a due regard had to those many, who are Offended at our Dissenters Conventicle Worship, as well as of those, who are said to be *Scandalized* by our Church service, I cannot at all guess, I shall only say here, that irreverent sitting at the receiving the Sacrament of the Lords Supper, Mens unmannerly wearing their Hats in time of Divine Worship, and oftentimes putting them off but half way at their Prayers, their indecent postures and anticlike gestures at their devotions, the extravagancies and follies (not to say worse) some of them are guilty of in their extemporary effusions, the strange uncouth Metaphors and Phrases they use in their Preaching; in a word, the slovenly performance of Divine Worship amongst the Dissenters is much more *Scandalous*, then all the Ceremonies of our Church can ever be.

4. Consider the *Scandal* that is hereby given to Magistrates and our Superiours, by bringing their Laws and Authority into contempt; concerning which the forenamed Mr. *Jeans* in his first Edition of his Discourse about *Abstinence from all Appearance of Evil*, hath these words, *If, saith he, it were better to be thrown into the bottom of the Sea with a Millstone about ones Neck, than to offend a little one, a poor and illiterate Arizian, what expression shall we then find answerable to the heinousness of a Scandal given to a Pious Magistrate, to a Religious Prince, to a Parliament, and Convocation, to an whole Church and Commonwealth?*

5. By this Separation from the Church, great *Scandal* is given to the Papists; not that they are displeased at it; they

they are not indeed offended in that sense, but this serves wonderfully to harden them in their false and Idolatrous Worship; it increaseth their confidence, that their Church is the only true Church of Christ, because amongst them only is found Peace and Unity; and this is a mighty temptation to many wavering Christians to turn Papists: insomuch that Mr. Baxter hath told us, that *Thousands have been drawn to Popery, or confirmed in it by this Argument already*, and he saith of himself, that he is persuaded, that all the Arguments else in Bellarmin, and all other Books that ever were written, have not done so much to make Papists in England, as the multitude of Sects among our selves. This indeed is a great Scandal to our Protestant Religion, and is that which the Papists are on all occasions so forward to object against us, and hit us in the teeth with; and by our hearty uniting with the Church of England, we may certainly wrest out of their hands the most dangerous weapon they use against the Reformation.

6. This tends to the Scandal of Religion in general. It prejudiceth men against it as an uncertain thing, a matter of endless dispute and debate; it makes some Men utterly reject it as consisting mostly in little trifles and niceties about which they observe the greatest noise and contention to be made or as destructive of the Publick Peace of Societies, when they see what dangerous feuds and quarrels commence from our Religious Differences, and all the disorder and confusion that they have caused here in England, shall by some be charged upon Christianity it self.

Thus our causeless Separations and Divisions open a wide door to Atheism, and all kind of Prophaneness and Irreligion: After this manner it was of old, and always will be, where there are Parties in Religion, and one contends that their Separation is lawful, and the other that it is unlawful, the Common people soon become doubtful and ready to forsake all Religion.

I might add here, that such Separations necessarily occasion breach of Charity; they beget implacable enmities and animosities: Hence cometh strife, emulation, envying,

one Party continually endeavouring to overtop the other, watching for one anothers halting, rejoicing in one anothers sins and misfortunes, constant undermining one another, to the disturbance of the Publick Government, and endangering the Civil Peace; of all which and much more than I can now mention the present distracted condition of our Nation is so great and undeniable an evidence that there need no more words to shew the mischiefs that attend such Divisions; and now let any one judge, whether the Peace and Unity of the Church, the maintaining of Charity amongst Brethren, the keeping out Popery, and Atheism, the preservation of the Authority of the Magistrate, and quiet of the Society we are Members of, the honour and credit of our Religion. Lastly, Whether giving *Offence* to all both Conformists and Nonconformists, those only excepted of our own particular Sect and Division, may *Scandalizing* them also in the true and proper sense of *Scandal*, be not of far greater and more weighty consideration, than the fear of displeasing or grieving some few *weak* dissatisfied Brethren; *Wo to those, by whom Offences come.* But these things I have very lightly touched, because they have been the subject of many Sermons and discourses lately published.

To sum up all I have said,

Since they, who dissent from the Church of *England*, are not such *weak* Persons as *St. Paul* all along describes and provides for; since we cannot by our Conformity really *Scandalize* or *Offend* them in that sense, in which the Scriptures use those words; since tho' we did give *Offence* to them by our Conformity, yet that would not excuse us from doing our duty, and by refusing to Conform we should do both them and others greater hurt and mischief; I think I may safely conclude, that *there cannot lie any obligation upon any private Christian (as the case now stands amongst us) to absent himself from his Parish-Church, or to forbear the use of the Forms of Prayer or Ceremonies by Law appointed, for fear of Offending his weak Brethren.*

I end all with one word of Advice. First, to those who are not convinced of the lawfulness of Conformity. Secondly, to those who are satisfied that it is lawful.

1. To those who are not convinced of the lawfulness of Conformity, and therefore urge so hard that they ought not to be *Offended* by us. I would beseech them that they would take some care and make some Conscience to avoid giving any needless *Offence* to those of the Church of *England*, and this cannot but be thought a reasonable request, since they require all others to be so tender of them. They ought not therefore to meet in such numbers, nor at the same time at which we Assemble to Worship God in our Publick Churches. Let them not affront our Service and Common-Prayers, nor revile our Bishops and Ministers, nor put on their Hats when at any time they chance to be present at our Service in our Churches, nor talk nor read in Books, nor make sour Faces at our Devotions; and when they observe these and other the like rules, they may then with a better grace (tho' with little reason) find fault with our Conformity as *Offensive* to them. I would be loth to say any thing, that should exasperate or provoke any of the Dissenters whose satisfaction I design: I very well know their *weakness*, that they cannot endure to be told of their faults. However I must tell them that there are no sort of persons in the Christian World professing Religion and Godliness, that have done such *Scandalous* things, as some of those who call themselves Protestant Dissenters. I forbear to name particulars.

2. As for those who are satisfied concerning the lawfulness of Conformity, I would desire them so to order their return to the Church, as not to give any just *Offence* to those whom they forsake; that is to say, that they would do it heartily and sincerely, that all may see they Conformed with a willing mind, being perswaded that it is their Duty so to do, and not
meerly

merely to satisfy the Law, or to save their Purse, or to get into an Office, or to capacitate them to Vote or the like. For such a kind of Conformity, as some practise, and call *Occasional Communion*; which is coming to Church and Sacrament to serve a turn, is truly *Scandalous* to all good Men of what persuasion soever.

F I N I S.

Imprimatur.

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For 1867.